



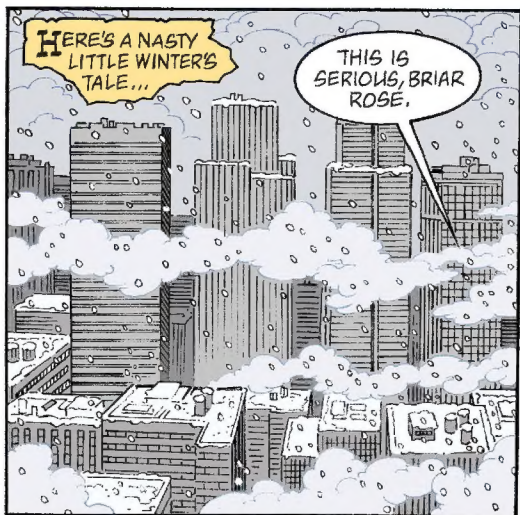
BILL WILLINGHAM LAN MEDINA CRAIG HAMILTON

NEW STORYLINE

FABLES



ten years on the edge
VERTIGO
ISSUE 12
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SUGGESTED FOR MATURE READERS

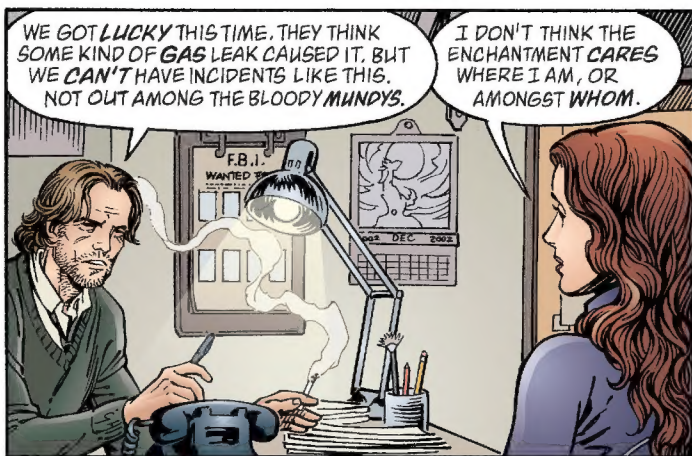


THIS IS SERIOUS, BRIAR ROSE.



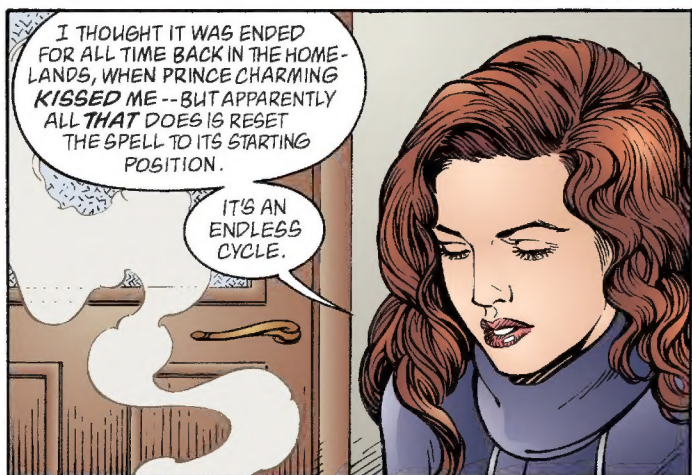


UNFORTUNATELY THAT'S THE WAY THE OLD ENCHANTMENT *WORKS*. FIRST I PRICK MY FINGER ON SOMETHING AND FALL ASLEEP, THEN EVERYONE AROUND ME FALLS ASLEEP, AND THEN THE THORN FOREST STARTS GROWING AROUND WHATEVER *BUILDING* I HAPPEN TO BE IN.



WE GOT *LUCKY* THIS TIME, THEY THINK SOME KIND OF *GAS LEAK* CAUSED IT, BUT WE *CAN'T* HAVE INCIDENTS LIKE THIS, NOT OUT AMONG THE *BLOODY MUNDYS*.

I DON'T THINK THE ENCHANTMENT *CARES* WHERE I AM, OR AMONGST WHOM.



I THOUGHT IT WAS ENDED FOR ALL TIME BACK IN THE *HOMELANDS*, WHEN PRINCE *CHARMING* *KISSED* ME -- BUT APPARENTLY ALL *THAT* DOES IS RESET THE *SPELL* TO ITS STARTING POSITION.

IT'S AN *ENDLESS* CYCLE.

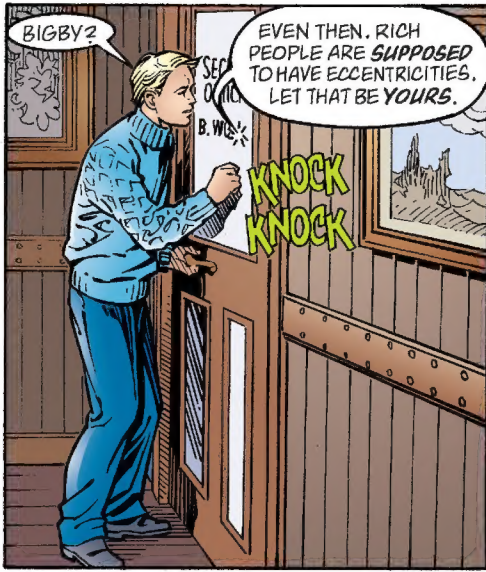


THEN YOU'RE JUST GOING TO HAVE TO *STOP* PRICKING YOUR FINGERS, YOU'RE STILL WEALTHY ENOUGH, GET SOME WORKMEN TO GO THROUGH YOUR APARTMENT AND REMOVE ALL THE ROUGH EDGES AND SHARP CORNERS.

AND WHEN YOU GO OUT, WEAR GLOVES, *THICK* ONES.



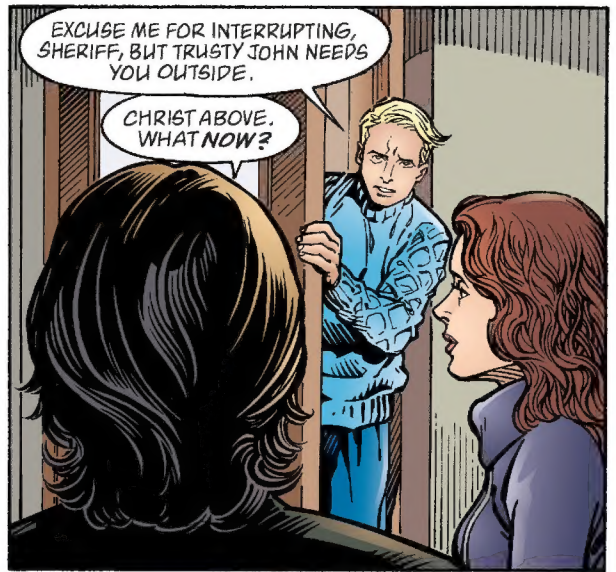
THAT MIGHT WORK WHILE WINTER LASTS, BUT NOT WHEN SPRING COMES.



BIGBY?

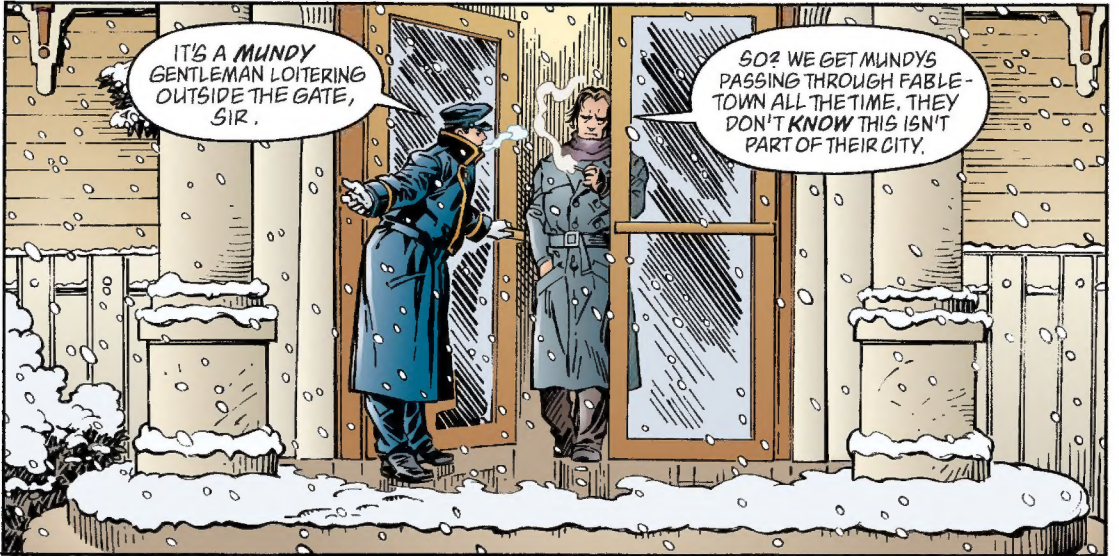
EVEN THEN, RICH PEOPLE ARE SUPPOSED TO HAVE ECCENTRICITIES. LET THAT BE YOURS.

KNOCK KNOCK



EXCUSE ME FOR INTERRUPTING, SHERIFF, BUT TRUSTY JOHN NEEDS YOU OUTSIDE.

CHRIST ABOVE. WHAT NOW?



IT'S A MUNDY GENTLEMAN LOITERING OUTSIDE THE GATE, SIR.

SO? WE GET MUNDYS PASSING THROUGH FABLE-TOWN ALL THE TIME. THEY DON'T KNOW THIS ISN'T PART OF THEIR CITY.



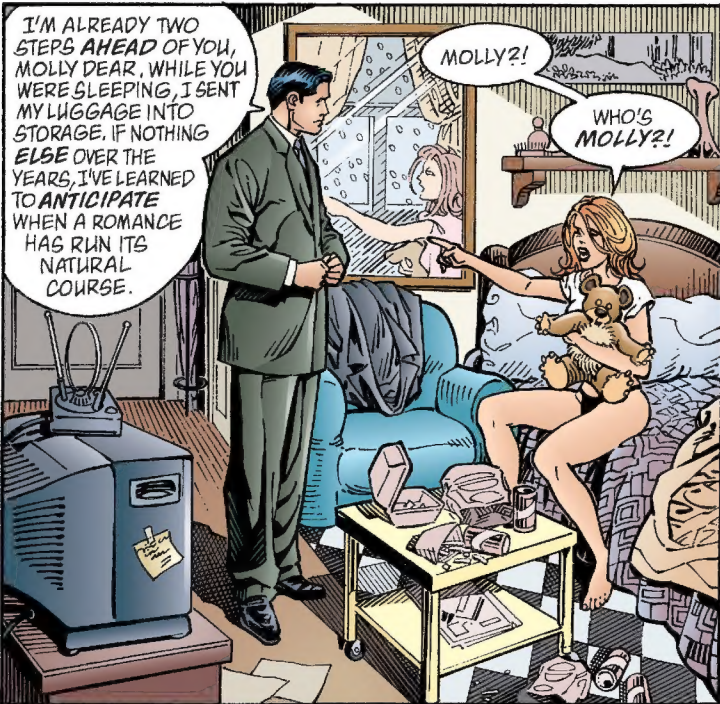
EXCEPT THAT THIS ONE ASKED FOR YOU BY NAME.





ELSEWHERE
IN THE CITY.

I WANT YOU OUT!
OUT OF MY APARTMENT
AND OUT OF MY
LIFE!



I'M ALREADY TWO
STEPS AHEAD OF YOU,
MOLLY DEAR. WHILE YOU
WERE SLEEPING, I SENT
MY LUGGAGE INTO
STORAGE. IF NOTHING
ELSE OVER THE
YEARS, I'VE LEARNED
TO ANTICIPATE
WHEN A ROMANCE
HAS RUN ITS
NATURAL
COURSE.

MOLLY?!

WHO'S
MOLLY?!



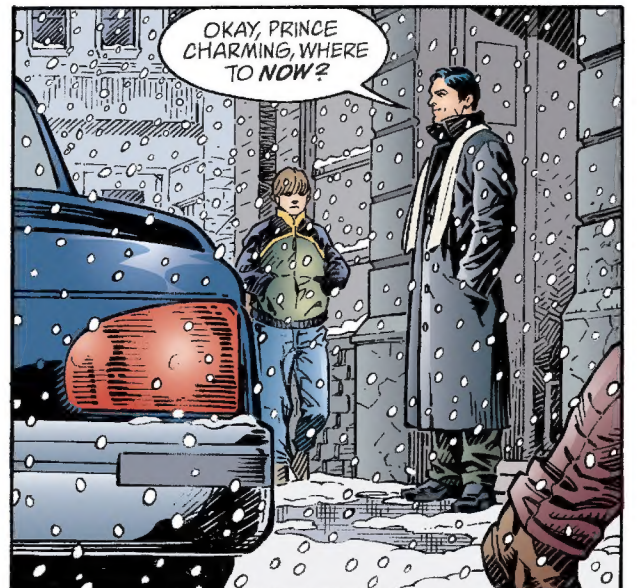
OOPS. SLIP OF THE TONGUE. I HAVE
TO CONFESS, I CAN NEVER RE-
MEMBER WHICH PRETTY LITTLE
GIRL I'M BUNKING WITH THESE
DAYS. WHICH ONE ARE YOU
AGAIN? DAPHNE? TRISH?



I KNEW IT! I KNEW YOU
WERE SNEAKING OTHER WOMEN
IN HERE WHILE I WAS OUT! AND
I KNOW YOU'VE BEEN STEAL-
ING MONEY FROM ME!

YES, I'M
A TERRIBLE
CAD.

YOU TAKE
CARE NOW, BETTY,
OR CHRISSEY, OR
WHOMEVER YOU
ARE.



OKAY, PRINCE
CHARMING, WHERE
TO NOW?

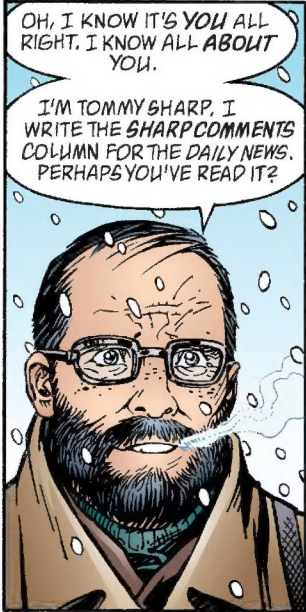


AND BACK IN FABLETOWN...

OKAY, WHAT'S YOUR STORY, FELLA?

MR. WOLF?

THAT DEPENDS. WHO THE HELL ARE YOU AND WHAT DO YOU WANT?



OH, I KNOW IT'S YOU ALL RIGHT. I KNOW ALL ABOUT YOU.

I'M TOMMY SHARP, I WRITE THE SHARP COMMENTS COLUMN FOR THE DAILY NEWS. PERHAPS YOU'VE READ IT?



NOPE. I READ THE POST.

AND YOU'RE ALREADY BEGINNING TO BORE ME. WHY DON'T YOU SAY WHAT YOU WANT TO SAY AND MOVE ALONG?



FINE. THEN HERE'S MY BUSINESS IN A NUTSHELL. FOR THE PAST FEW YEARS I'VE BEEN WORKING ON A STORY ABOUT YOUR UNDERGROUND COMMUNITY.



I'VE PUT IN THE HOURS, CHECKED AND DOUBLE-CHECKED THE RESEARCH AND DONE THE LEG-WORK.

HOW LOVELY FOR YOU.



I KNOW ALL YOUR SECRETS.

THEN YOU'RE WAY AHEAD OF ME.



AND, AS A JOURNALISTIC COURTESY, I'VE DECIDED TO FINALLY REVEAL MYSELF--COME OUT OF THE SHADOWS, SO TO SPEAK--

--IN ORDER TO GIVE YOU AN OPPORTUNITY TO RESPOND, BEFORE I PRINT MY STORY,

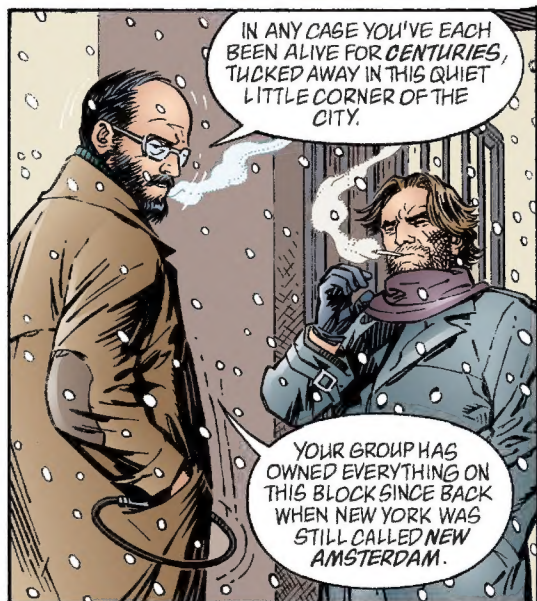
RESPOND TO WHAT? SO FAR YOU'VE ONLY BABBLED NONSENSE.



TAKE THAT EVASIVE TACK IF YOU LIKE, BUT I KNOW WHAT I KNOW.

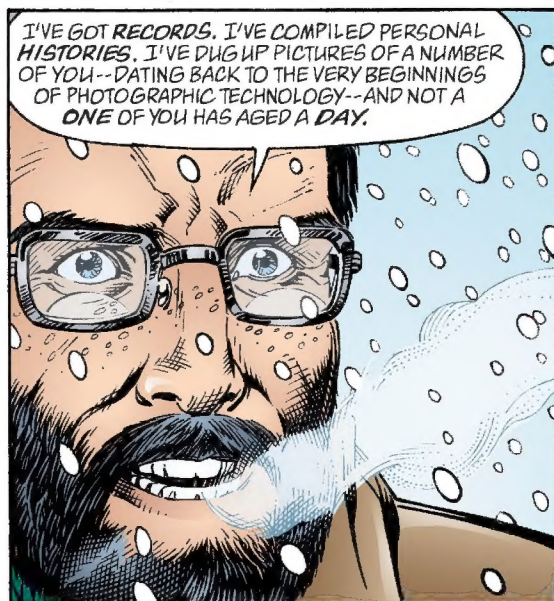
GET THAT THING OUT FROM UNDER MY NOSE.

YOU'RE A COMMUNITY OF IMMORTALS--PROBABLY.



IN ANY CASE YOU'VE EACH BEEN ALIVE FOR CENTURIES, TUCKED AWAY IN THIS QUIET LITTLE CORNER OF THE CITY.

YOUR GROUP HAS OWNED EVERYTHING ON THIS BLOCK SINCE BACK WHEN NEW YORK WAS STILL CALLED NEW AMSTERDAM.



I'VE GOT RECORDS. I'VE COMPILED PERSONAL HISTORIES. I'VE DUG UP PICTURES OF A NUMBER OF YOU--DATING BACK TO THE VERY BEGINNINGS OF PHOTOGRAPHIC TECHNOLOGY--AND NOT A ONE OF YOU HAS AGED A DAY.



SO LET ME GUESS. THIS STORY OF YOURS IS GOING TO BE PUBLISHED BETWEEN THE BIG ELVIS IS AN ALIEN EXPOSE, AND THE LATEST INSTALLMENT OF I HAD GOATBOY'S LOVE CHILD.

MOCK ME IF YOU LIKE, BUT WE BOTH KNOW I'M GOING TO WIN A PULITZER PRIZE WITH THIS.



MAYBE EVEN THE NOBEL PRIZE --

-- FOR BEING THE FIRST TO COME UP WITH UNIMPEACHABLE PROOF OF THE EXISTENCE OF YOUR KIND.

AND JUST WHAT DO YOU IMAGINE "MY KIND" IS?



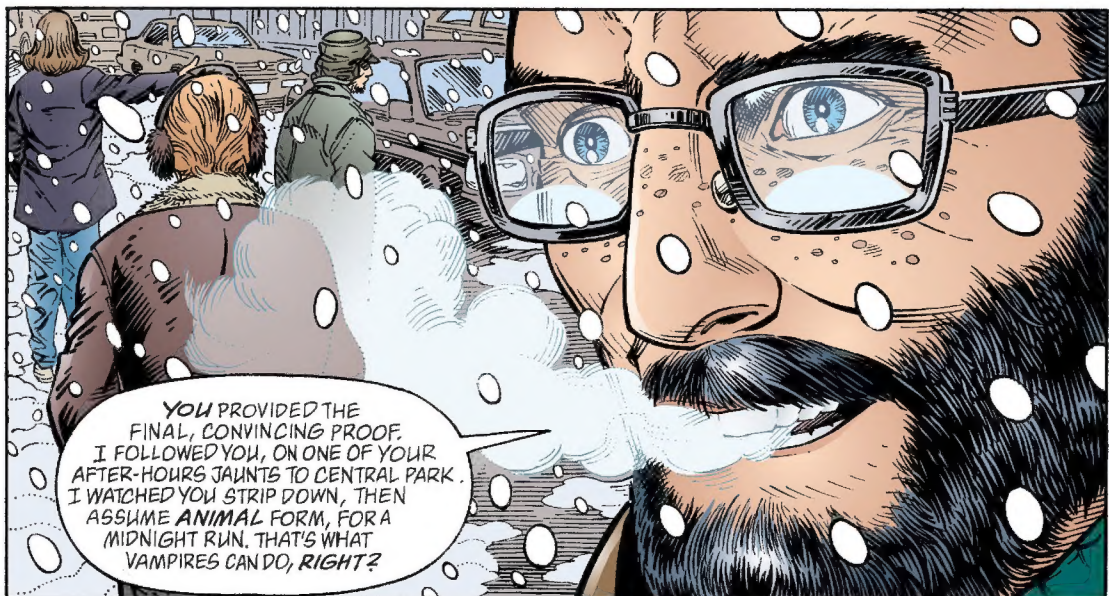
VAMPIRES OF COURSE.

SERIOUSLY?

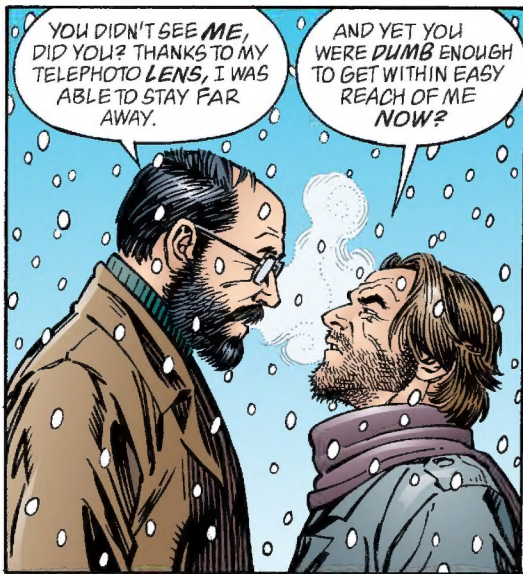


OH MY GOD, YOU ARE SERIOUS.

A GROUP OF IMMORTALS, WITH FANTASTIC POWERS, PASSING THEMSELVES OFF AS NORMAL HUMANS? I'VE READ ANNE RICE. I'VE SEEN THE MOVIES. IT ALL FITS.



YOU PROVIDED THE FINAL, CONVINCING PROOF. I FOLLOWED YOU, ON ONE OF YOUR AFTER-HOURS JAUNTS TO CENTRAL PARK. I WATCHED YOU STRIP DOWN, THEN ASSUME ANIMAL FORM, FOR A MIDNIGHT RUN. THAT'S WHAT VAMPIRES CAN DO, RIGHT?



YOU DIDN'T SEE *ME*, DID YOU? THANKS TO MY TELEPHOTO *LENS*, I WAS ABLE TO STAY FAR AWAY.

AND YET YOU WERE *DUMB* ENOUGH TO GET WITHIN EASY REACH OF ME *NOW*?



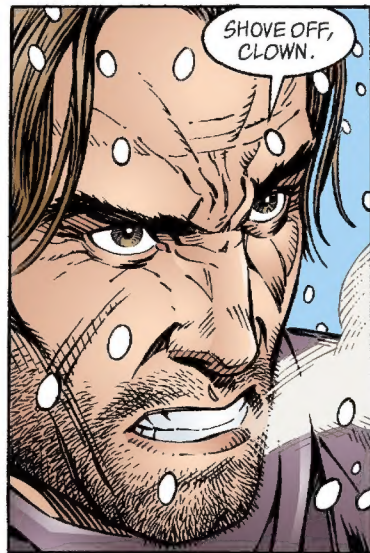
ONLY IN THE *DAYTIME*, WHEN YOU HAVE NO POWER OVER ME. YOU CAN'T MESMERIZE ME *NOW*. YOU CAN'T HURT ME... *uhm... CAN YOU?*

YOU'RE *INSANE*.



PLAY IT THAT WAY, IF YOU *INSIST*.

BUT YOU DON'T HAVE LONG TO GET YOUR *SIDE* OF THE STORY ON RECORD BEFORE I PUBLISH.



SHOVE OFF, *CLOWN*.



HERE'S MY *CARD*, MISTER WOLF. CALL ME IF YOU CHANGE YOUR *MIND*.

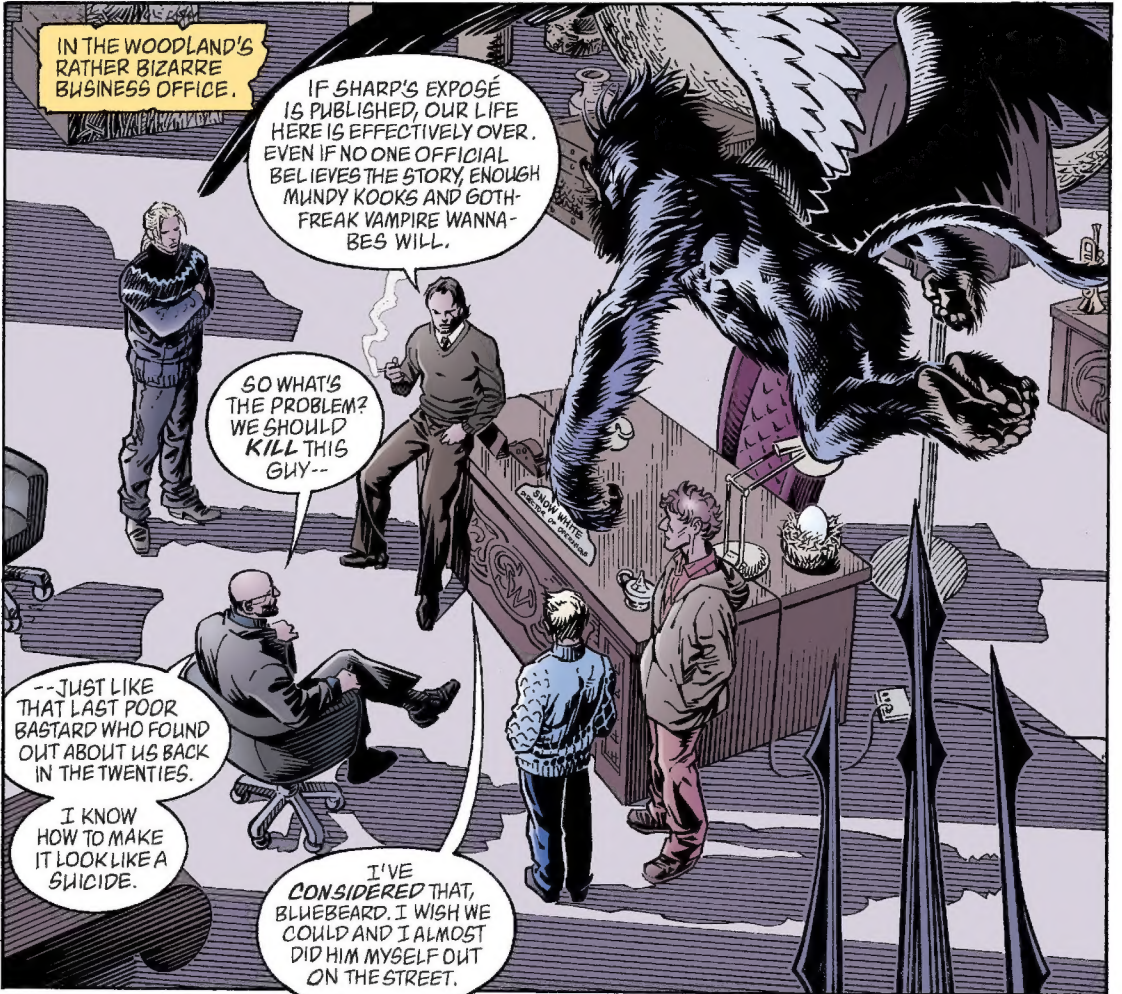
AND DON'T THINK FOR A MOMENT YOU CAN CATCH UP TO ME AFTER THE SUN GOES DOWN.



I KNOW HOW IT *WORKS*. I'LL BE SAFELY *HOME* BY THEN, AND VAMPIRES CAN'T ENTER MY PERSONAL RESIDENCE WITHOUT MY *INVITATION*.

I'M *NOT* AFRAID OF YOU.

I'M *REALLY* NOT.





SHOULDN'T MISS WHITE BE HERE?

NO. DESPITE MY PREFERENCES, THIS MAY END UP REQUIRING SOME DIRTY BUSINESS.

AS LONG AS SHE'S STILL CONVALESCING, I WANT SNOW KEPT OUT OF IT.



SO WHAT DO WE DO?

YOU LOOK LIKE YOU ALREADY HAVE A PLAN IN MIND, WOLF.

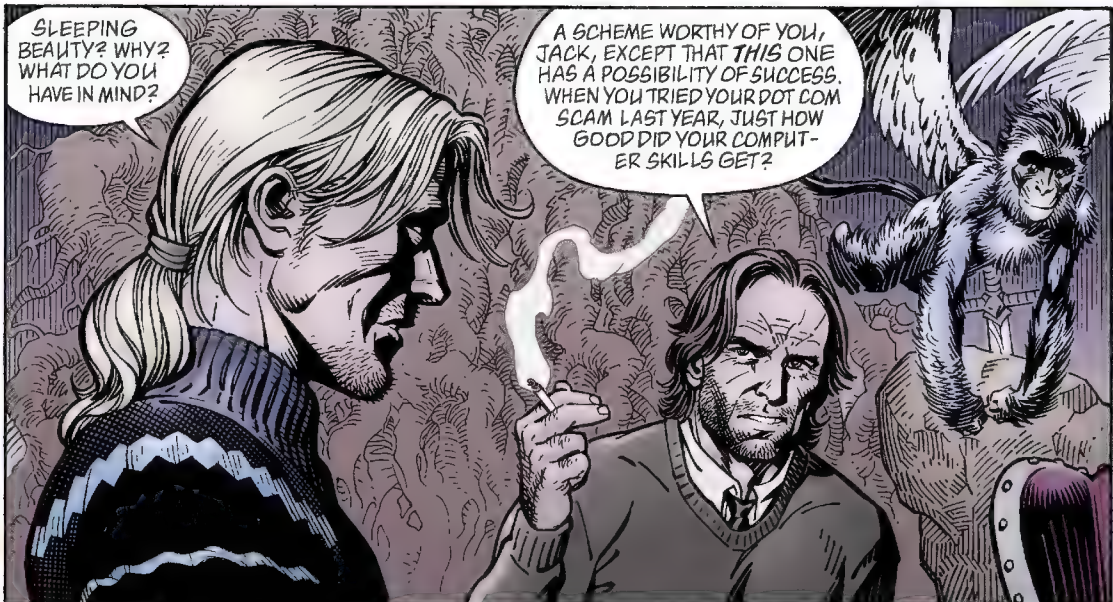
POSSIBLY.

WE NEED TO MOVE FAST-TONIGHT.



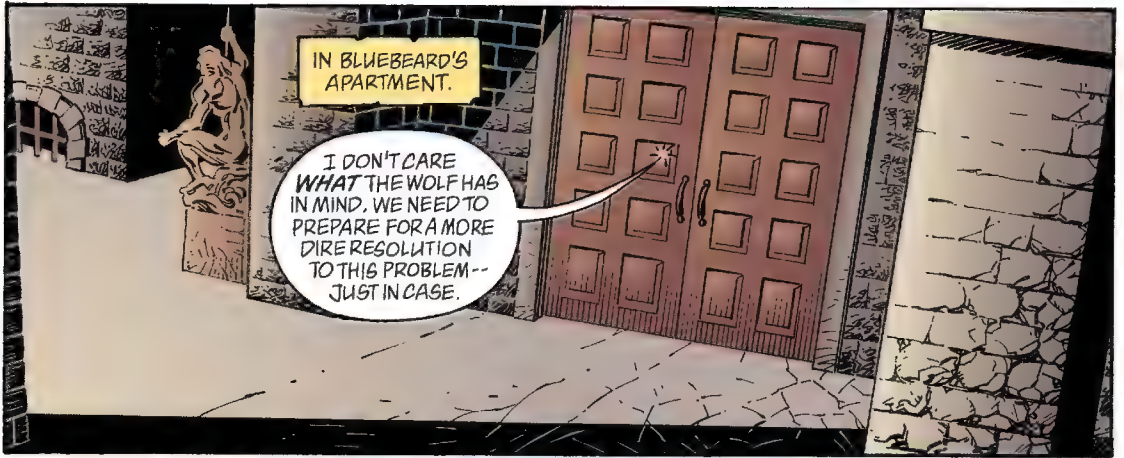
BUT FIRST WE HAVE TO FIND OUT WHERE PRINCE CHARMING IS CAMPING THESE DAYS.

AND WE'LL NEED BRIAR ROSE'S HELP.



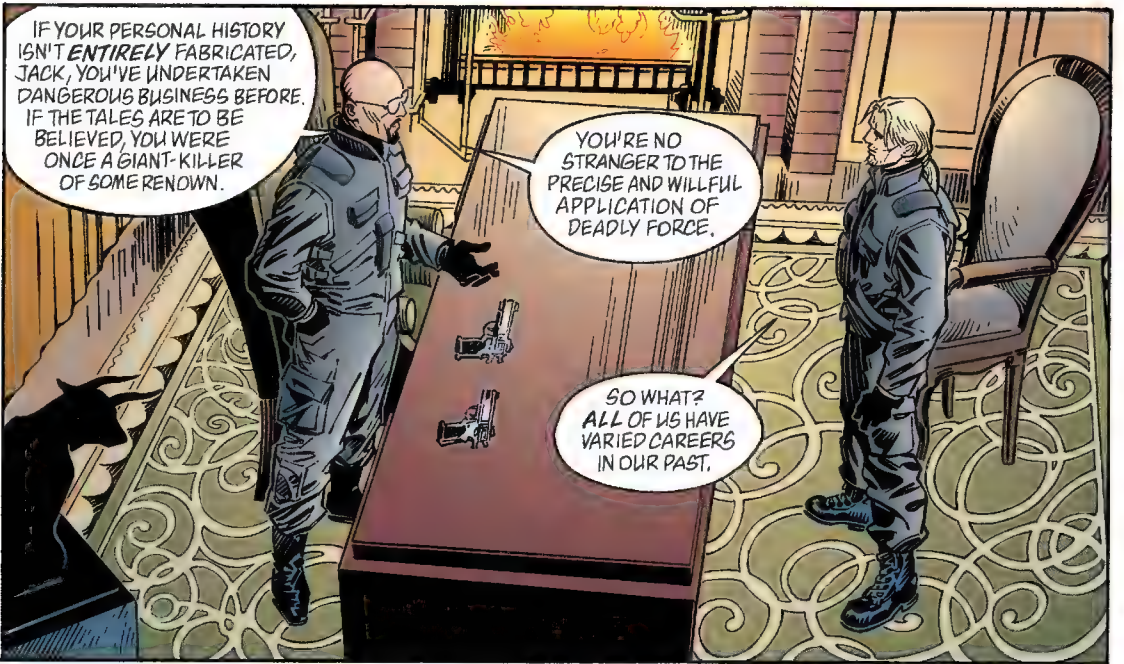
SLEEPING BEAUTY? WHY? WHAT DO YOU HAVE IN MIND?

A SCHEME WORTHY OF YOU, JACK, EXCEPT THAT THIS ONE HAS A POSSIBILITY OF SUCCESS. WHEN YOU TRIED YOUR DOT COM SCAM LAST YEAR, JUST HOW GOOD DID YOUR COMPUTER SKILLS GET?



IN BLUEBEARD'S APARTMENT.

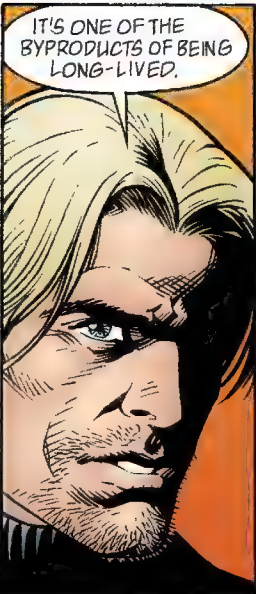
I DON'T CARE WHAT THE WOLF HAS IN MIND. WE NEED TO PREPARE FOR A MORE DIRE RESOLUTION TO THIS PROBLEM-- JUST IN CASE.



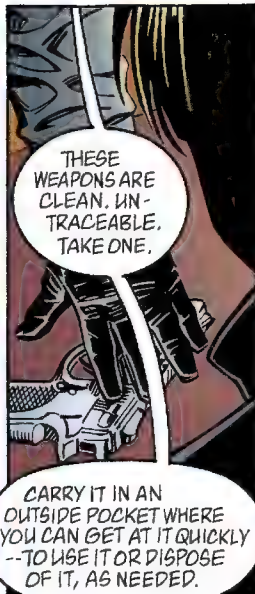
IF YOUR PERSONAL HISTORY ISN'T ENTIRELY FABRICATED, JACK, YOU'VE UNDERTAKEN DANGEROUS BUSINESS BEFORE. IF THE TALES ARE TO BE BELIEVED, YOU WERE ONCE A GIANT-KILLER OF SOME RENOWN.

YOU'RE NO STRANGER TO THE PRECISE AND WILLFUL APPLICATION OF DEADLY FORCE.

SO WHAT? ALL OF US HAVE VARIED CAREERS IN OUR PAST.



IT'S ONE OF THE BYPRODUCTS OF BEING LONG-LIVED.



THESE WEAPONS ARE CLEAN. UN-TRACEABLE. TAKE ONE.

CARRY IT IN AN OUTSIDE POCKET WHERE YOU CAN GET AT IT QUICKLY --TO USE IT OR DISPOSE OF IT, AS NEEDED.



IF WE CAN RESOLVE THIS BIGBY'S WAY, ALL TO THE GOOD. BUT IF THE WOLF'S PLAN FAILS--

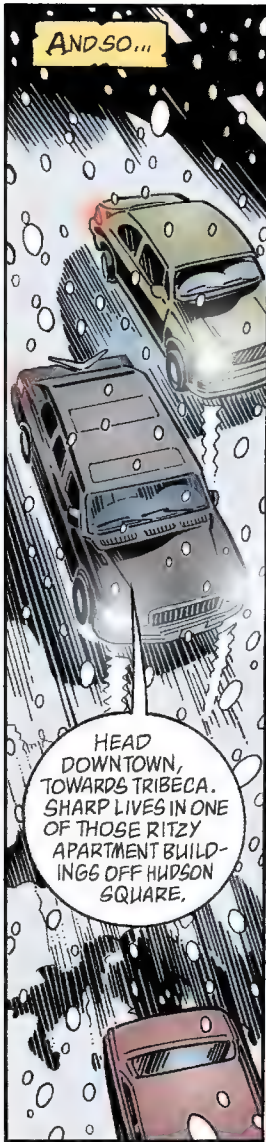
--WE NEED TO BE READY TO STEP IN.



PARDON THE INTERRUPTION, SIR.

MISTER WOLF IS READY TO GO.

WE'RE ON OUR WAY.



AND SO...

HEAD DOWNTOWN, TOWARDS TRIBECA. SHARP LIVES IN ONE OF THOSE RITZY APARTMENT BUILDINGS OFF HUDSON SQUARE.



EVERYONE KNOW THEIR PARTS?



PRINCE CHARMING AND BRIAR ROSE-- YOU'RE UP FIRST.

LET ME HELP YOU, MY DEAR. THIS SNOW MAKES FOR TREACHEROUS FOOTING.

AND YOU WOULD KNOW "TREACHEROUS" WHEN YOU SEE IT, DEAR--



--BEING SO PERSONALLY EXPERIENCED AT IT.

NOW NOW, DARLING, THIS IS NO TIME TO DREDGE UP THE PAST.

REMEMBER: WE'RE A DELIRIOUSLY HAPPY MUNDY COUPLE.



TWO OF THIS TOWN'S SEEMINGLY ENDLESS SUPPLY OF BUBBLE-HEADED SOCIALITES.

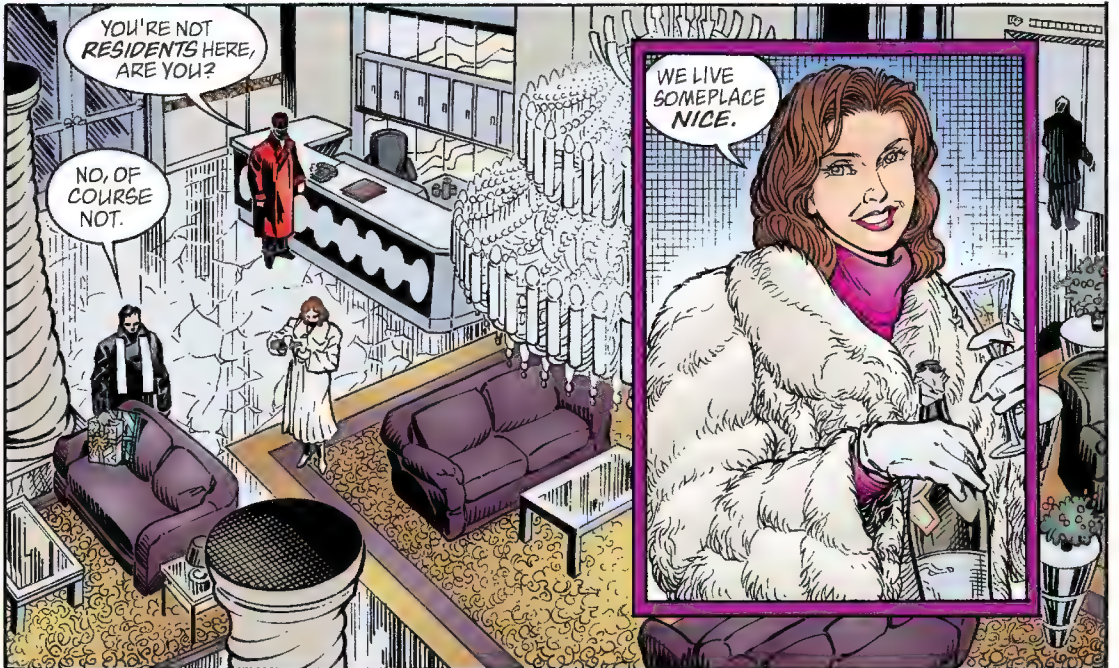
I'LL DO MY PART, "DARLING," BUT KEEP YOUR HANDS TO YOURSELF.



GOOD EVENING, SIR, MA'AM. THIS IS QUITE A SPOT OF WEATHER WE'RE HAVING, EH?

THANK YOU, MY GOOD MAN.

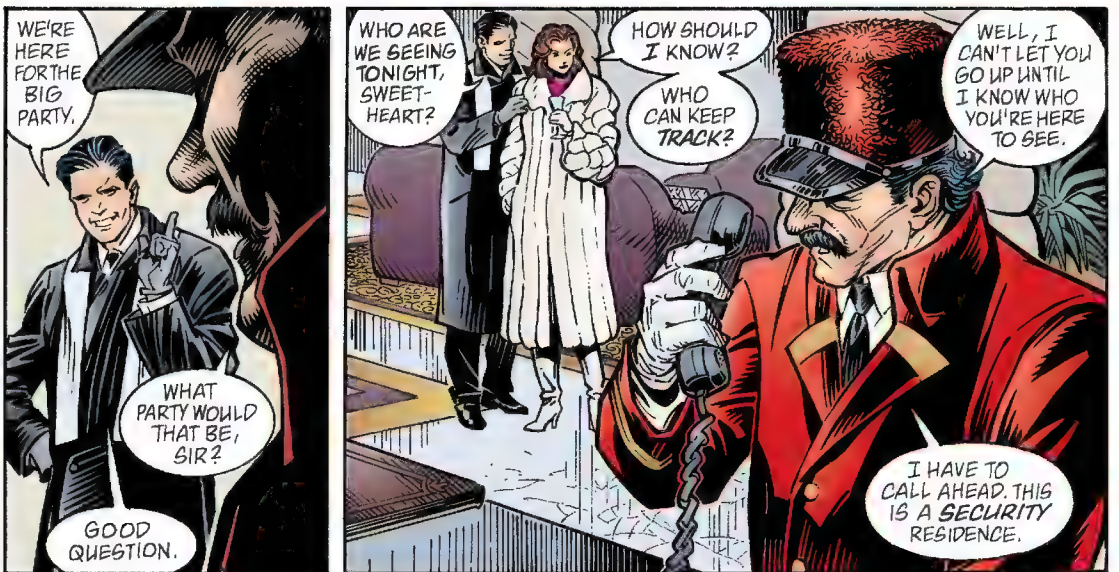
AFTER YOU, HORTENSE, MY DOVE.



YOU'RE NOT RESIDENTS HERE, ARE YOU?

NO, OF COURSE NOT.

WE LIVE SOMEPLACE NICE.



WE'RE HERE FOR THE BIG PARTY.

WHAT PARTY WOULD THAT BE, SIR?

GOOD QUESTION.

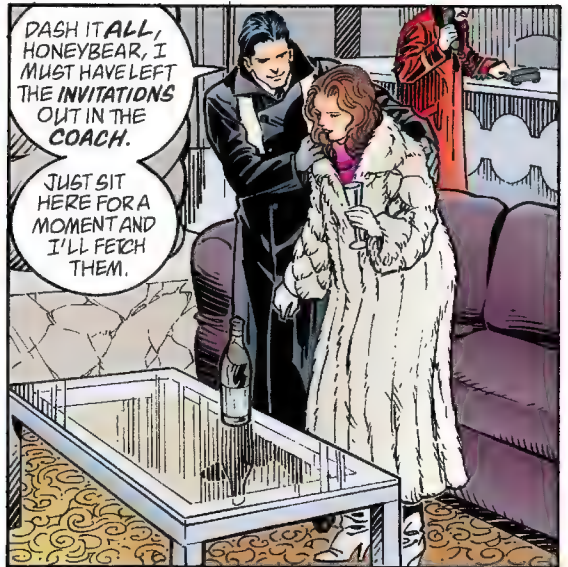
WHO ARE WE SEEING TONIGHT, SWEET-HEART?

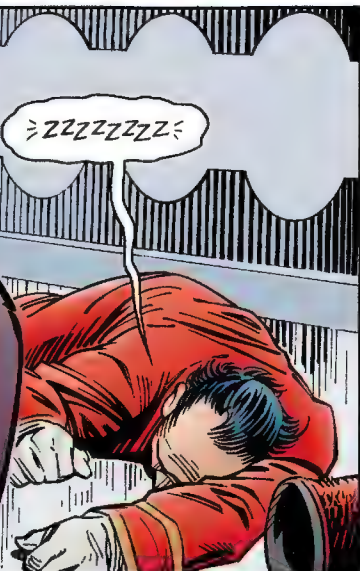
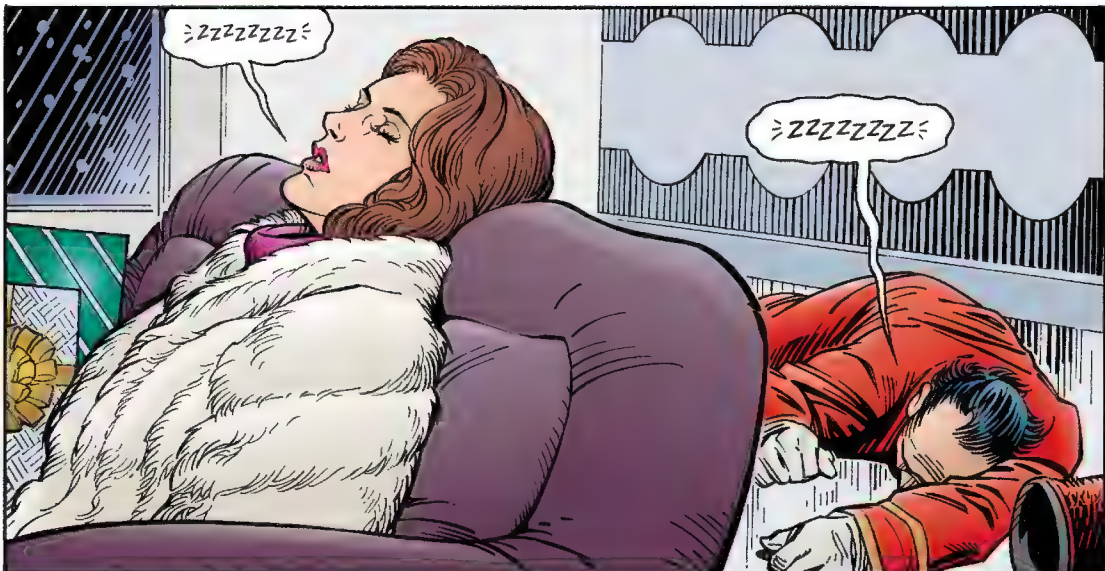
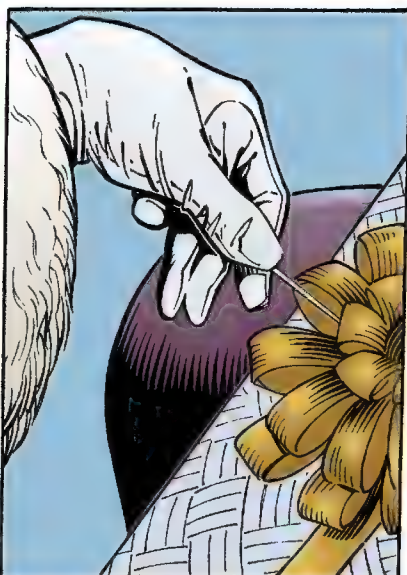
HOW SHOULD I KNOW?

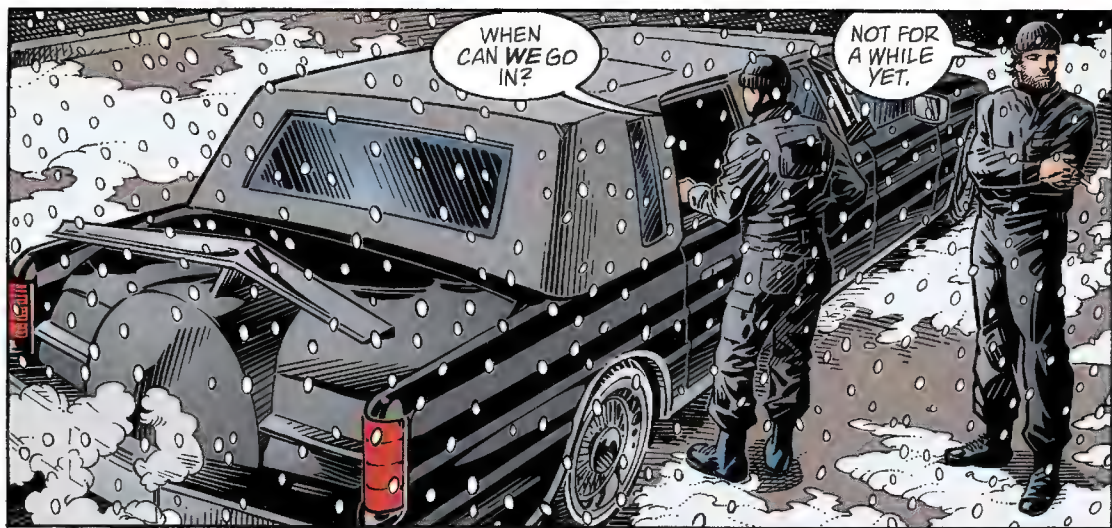
WHO CAN KEEP TRACK?

WELL, I CAN'T LET YOU GO UP UNTIL I KNOW WHO YOU'RE HERE TO SEE.

I HAVE TO CALL AHEAD. THIS IS A SECURITY RESIDENCE.

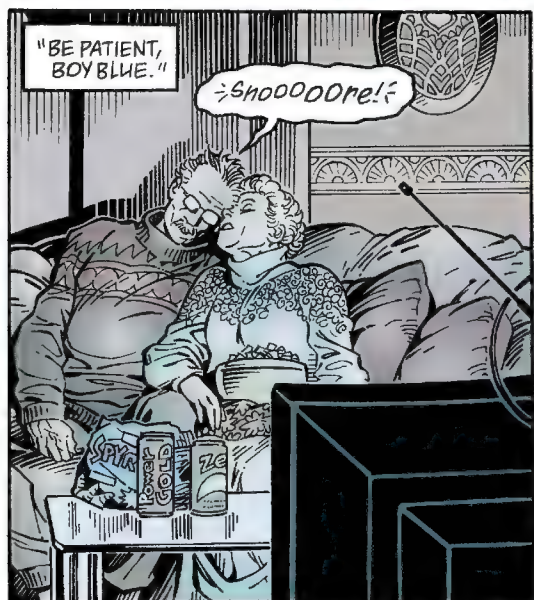






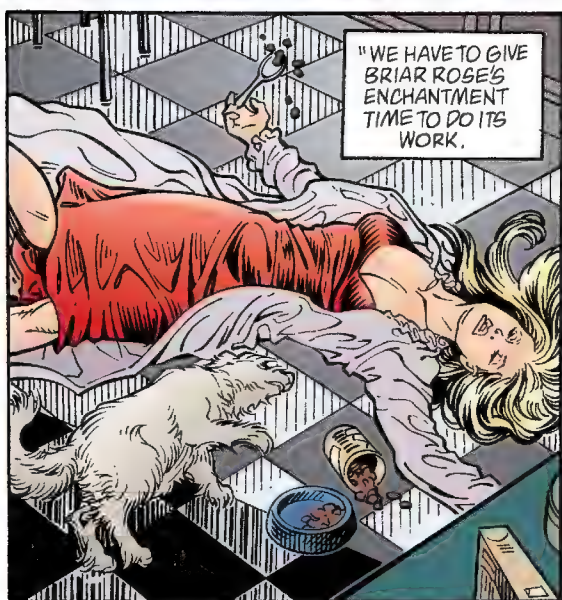
WHEN CAN WE GO IN?

NOT FOR A WHILE YET.

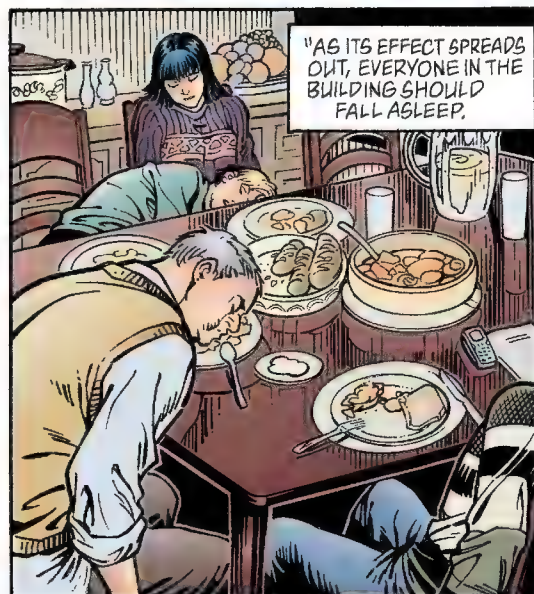


"BE PATIENT, BOY BLUE."

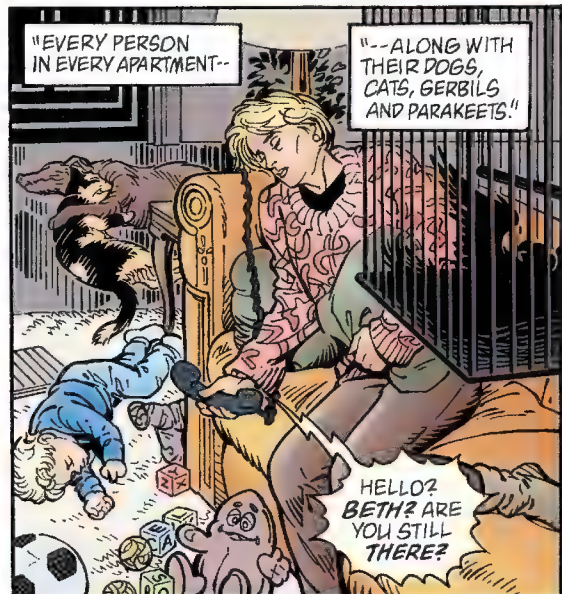
SHOOOOOme!?



"WE HAVE TO GIVE BRIAR ROSES ENCHANTMENT TIME TO DO ITS WORK."



"AS ITS EFFECT SPREADS OUT, EVERYONE IN THE BUILDING SHOULD FALL ASLEEP."



"EVERY PERSON IN EVERY APARTMENT--"

"--ALONG WITH THEIR DOGS, CATS, GERBILS AND PARAKEETS."

HELLO? BETH? ARE YOU STILL THERE?





APPARENTLY.

THAT'S KIND OF COOL. IF WE WERE VAMPIRE'S WE'D ALL BE RICH.



HOW SO?

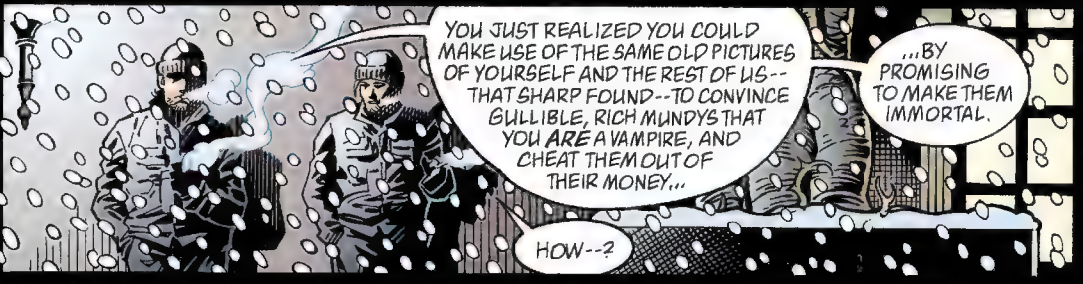
THINK IT THROUGH. VAMPIRES MAKE MORE VAMPIRES JUST BY SUCKING PEOPLE'S BLOOD, RIGHT? DO YOU KNOW HOW MUCH THESE MUNDY FUCKS WOULD PAY TO SOMEONE WHO COULD MAKE THEM IMMORTAL?



HEY! I JUST THOUGHT--!

FORGET IT, JACK.

FORGET WHAT?



YOU JUST REALIZED YOU COULD MAKE USE OF THE SAME OLD PICTURES OF YOURSELF AND THE REST OF US-- THAT SHARP FOUND-- TO CONVINCE GULLIBLE, RICH MUNDYS THAT YOU ARE A VAMPIRE, AND CHEAT THEM OUT OF THEIR MONEY...

...BY PROMISING TO MAKE THEM IMMORTAL.

HOW--?



I'M WAY AHEAD OF YOU, JACK. I ALWAYS WILL BE.

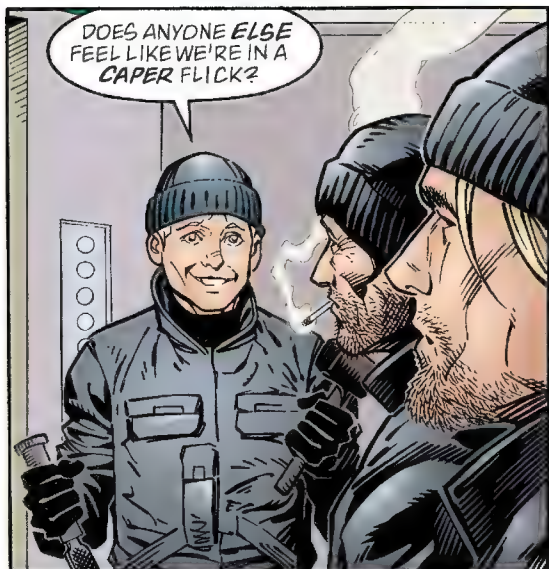
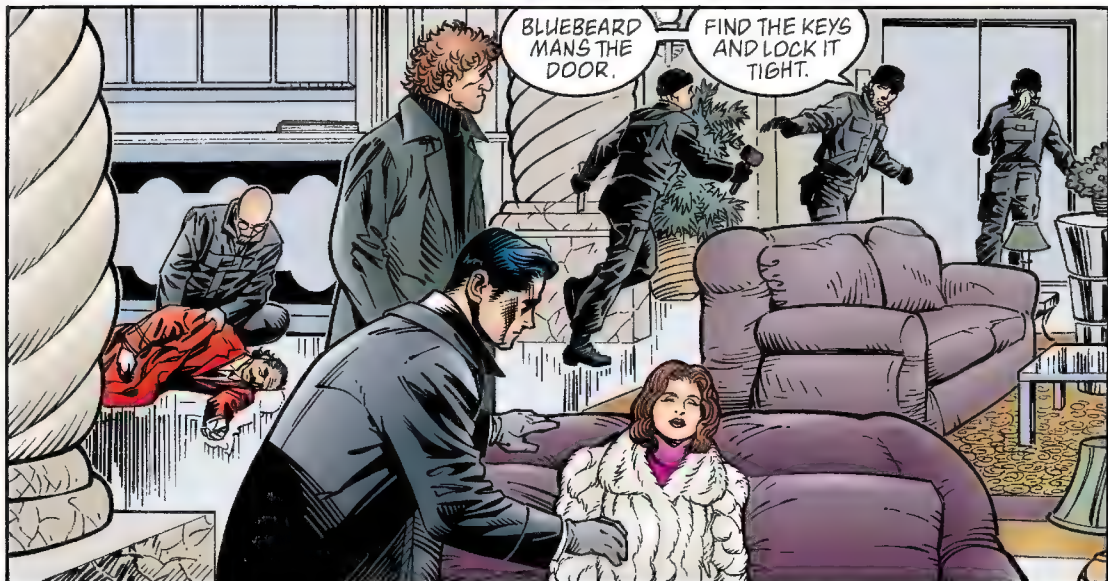
AFTER ALL THESE YEARS, I KNOW HOW YOUR MIND WORKS. TRY IT AND I'LL LOCK YOU UP FOR A CENTURY.

DAMN IT, BIGBY!



SHUT UP, JACK.

THE THORN-GROWING PHASE HAS STARTED.







TIME CREEPS BY AND THE BUILDING CONTINUES TO SLEEP...

...EXCEPT FOR A HANDFUL OF LATE INTRUDERS.



DID WE GET EVERYTHING PERTAINING TO US?

I THINK SO. HE HAD A COMPLETE DARKROOM FULL OF ALL SORTS OF PICTURES OF US.

I'VE GOT GOOD NEWS AND BAD NEWS, BIGBY.

SHIT. WHAT NOW?

I SUCCESSFULLY KILLED EVERY FILE HE HAD--NO PROBLEMO, BUT I HAD A LOOK THROUGH HIS E-MAIL RECORDS. HE BACKED UP ALL OF HIS WORK BY SENDING IT OUT.



OUT? WHAT DO YOU MEAN OUT? OUT WHERE?



THERE ARE SECURE PLACES ON THE INTERNET YOU CAN SEND STUFF--FILES--ANYTHING YOU WANT TO PROTECT FROM PEOPLE LIKE ME.

IT LOOKS LIKE SHARP MADE FREQUENT USE OF THESE SYSTEMS.



SO WE'VE WASTED ALL THIS EFFORT? WE CAN'T GET TO THOSE DUPLICATE FILES?

NOT WITHOUT PUTTING A BETTER COMPUTER HACKER THAN ME TO WORK FOR A WEEK, OR MORE.

SO SHARP WINS, WE'RE SCREWED.



THAT DEPENDS. I HAVE AN ALTERNATE PLAN. BUT IT DEPENDS ON HOW EVIL YOU'RE PREPARED TO GET.

NEXT: REALLY DIRTY DEEDS.



NATHAN